

Mass. AG Calls For More Casino Regulations

By Philip Marcelo, Associated Press
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BOSTON (AP) — Concerns that casinos could lead to greater criminal activity led Massachusetts' top prosecutor to urge the state's gambling overseers to come up with regulations combating money laundering, human trafficking and other illicit activities.

Attorney General Maura Healey suggests that the state Gaming Commission requires casinos to file timely reports to the state about suspicious activity and large cash transactions and to incorporate “zero tolerance” language in employee and vendor contracts about trafficking in people and drugs, among other measures.



Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey. (WBZ-TV)

“Such regulations should deter would-be money launderers, and identify those engaged in other criminal enterprises, such as drug traffickers, human traffickers, loan sharks and organized crime,” Healey wrote in the letter dated March 27.

State Gaming Commission Chairman Stephen Crosby said the panel will discuss the letter.

“Obviously, everyone is opposed to money laundering and human trafficking,” he said Thursday. “The question is, What’s the most effective way to make sure that these things are minimized? ... We don’t want to blow it out of proportion, but you do want to think aggressively and creatively about how you make sure these things don’t become problematic in our state.”

The American Gaming Association, a casino industry trade group, called Healey’s concerns “completely misguided ” and indicative of a “deep and disappointing bias against the casino gaming industry.”

The organization said it recently provided Healey’s office with a “comprehensive document” about the industry’s anti-money laundering efforts, which it says were developed in coordination with the federal government.

Healey, a Democrat and casino opponent elected in November, has promised to make gambling enforcement a priority, saying she’ll be looking to ensure casino consumer protection laws are enforced, criminal activity is prosecuted and casinos honor the commitments they’ve made to cities and towns.

After years of debate and controversy, Massachusetts’ casino industry launches in earnest with the expected June 24 opening of a \$225 million Penn National Gaming slot parlor on the Rhode Island border.

Two other major resort casinos are also in development: an \$800 million MGM casino in Springfield and a \$1.7 billion Wynn casino in the Boston suburb of Everett.

In a related development, Revere’s mayor is calling on Healey to launch an investigation into a land deal between Wynn Resorts and the state transit agency.

Revere Mayor Daniel Rizzo, whose administration is suing to block the casino development, suggests Healey look into how the deal came about, including why much of the discussions happened outside of public view, how Wynn became the “winning bidder” and how the \$6 million sale price was reached.

“Allowing a state agency and a private developer to act in this manner erodes the public’s confidence in government,” he wrote in a Thursday letter. “Wynn has been allowed to proceed with this project seemingly unchecked, with little regard for law or impacted communities.”

State Gaming Commission members said Thursday that they are closely watching the issue. Healey’s office and Wynn Resorts did not immediately comment.

The casino purchased the roughly 1.75 acres, which are part of a bus repair facility, for the resort’s main point of entry.

But the governor’s office of Energy and Environmental Affairs has said the state Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority violated state regulations when it completed the land deal before it could complete its own review.